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Two anti-vax protests in two days, including one at a school, as Quebecers challenge new law



Protesters decry law limiting anti-vax demos



Anti-vaxxers defy rule, p school



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MONTREAL - Quebec may have passed a bill limiting anti-vax protests on Thursday, but the protests are far from over, judging by the last two days.

On Friday, the same day the law came into force, a man picketed Quebec City high-school students anyway, while on Saturday, hundreds of Montrealers protested the new law.

“Injecting kids, it’s criminal,” read one sign at Saturday’s protest at Parc Lafontaine, which was attended by a few hundred people.

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protests near schools, hospitals

“Make influenza great again,” read another woman’s handmade sign, with the other side saying “unmasked, unmuzzled, unvaccinated, unafraid.”

Those protesting at Parc Lafontaine said they’re upset not only about Quebec’s proof-of-vaccination system but also about the new law, which prevents them from picketing within 50 metres of hospitals, COVID-19 clinics and schools at risk of a fine up to \$12,000.

“More and more, they’re censoring us,” said Isabelle Caty, an organizer of the protest.

A man insisted the protest should not be called “anti-vaccine” but said he likes to call himself “pro-choice.”

Others told CTV that they believe the government is essentially forcing them to be vaccinated but not listening to the so-called health experts the protesters follow.

A young man asked why “the government censors them and their treatments,” which he said are “effective and low-cost.” It was unclear exactly what he was referring to.

One health expert said it’s frustrating to see people cherry-picking information and ignoring overwhelming scientific consensus produced by months of tireless work.

“It’s perplexing,” said Dr. Donald Vinh, one Montreal immunologist.

“We are 18 months or so into a pandemic which has been avalanched by amazing science, by people who work to get to that science, to make those advances that have impact on health care,” he said.

“Then we have people who are not trained in the sciences questioning it.”

As for the cherry-picking, Vinh said it's true that some people have had adverse effects after taking a COVID-19 vaccine. But the benefits of the vaccines far outweigh the risks, he said.

"If you look at the facts, that rate is exceedingly small," he said of the adverse reactions.

At least one regular Montrealer is also losing patience—a man stopped by the protest to argue with one of the demonstrators, but quickly gave up.

"I'm a health worker," said the man.

"I've seen what COVID does to people. It's so sad. I don't understand where these people are coming from."

Many of the protesters insisted they're not anti-vaccine, and are just asking questions, saying they want a real debate with those in power. They'll keep protesting until that happens, they say.

Others, however, carried signs with clear anti-vax messages like "DANGER, POISON," and a picture of rats.

As has been true for weeks, the majority of the 719 new COVID-19 cases announced in Quebec today are among people who aren't fully vaccinated.

Eighty-six per cent of the Quebecers newly admitted to hospital in the last 24 hours with serious COVID-19 symptoms (32 out of 37) weren't vaccinated.

QUEBEC CITY HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS PICKETED

On Friday, another protester put Quebec's new anti-vax law to the test.

François Amalega, a well-known organizer of past anti-vaccine protests in Montreal and Quebec City, stood outside

a Quebec City high school at midday and tried to speak and pass out written material to students on their way to a climate march.

The new provincial law, passed Thursday evening, bans protesting over COVID-19 laws or vaccines within 50 metres of schools, hospitals or other sites administering COVID-19 vaccines or tests.

A police officer was on site at the Quebec City school, École Joseph-François-Perrault, and told Amalega he wasn't permitted to protest so close to the school.

However, for legal procedural reasons, the law didn't fully come into force until sometime during the day on Friday.

Amalega complied with the officers' instructions and he wasn't fined, but a report was written up and it's possible he will be ticketed for the incident at a later time, police said.

Amalega, who was taking video of himself at the time, also said he plans to create anti-vaccine materials in comic-book form in order to better convince young people of his ideas.

He's said that he doesn't believe in COVID-19 or in the vaccines.

--With files from CTV's Max Harrold

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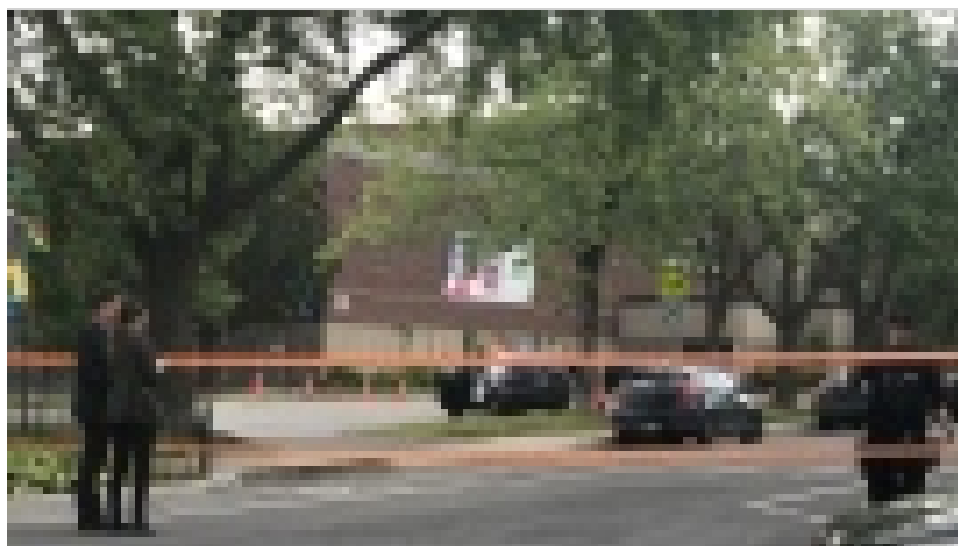
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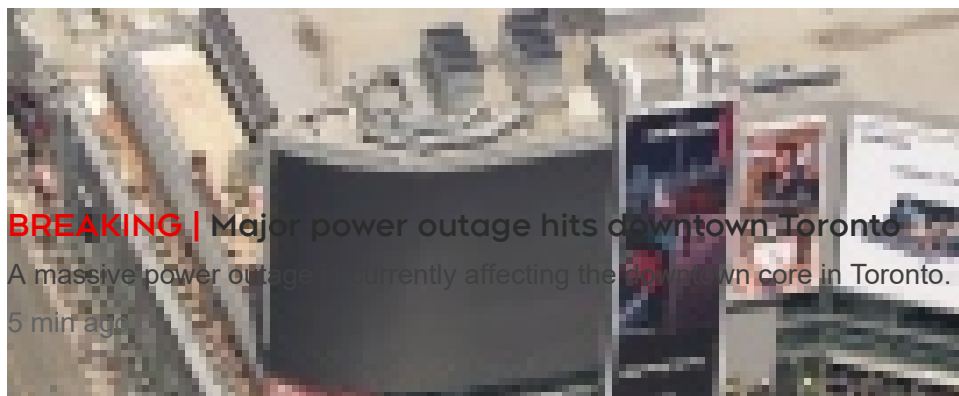
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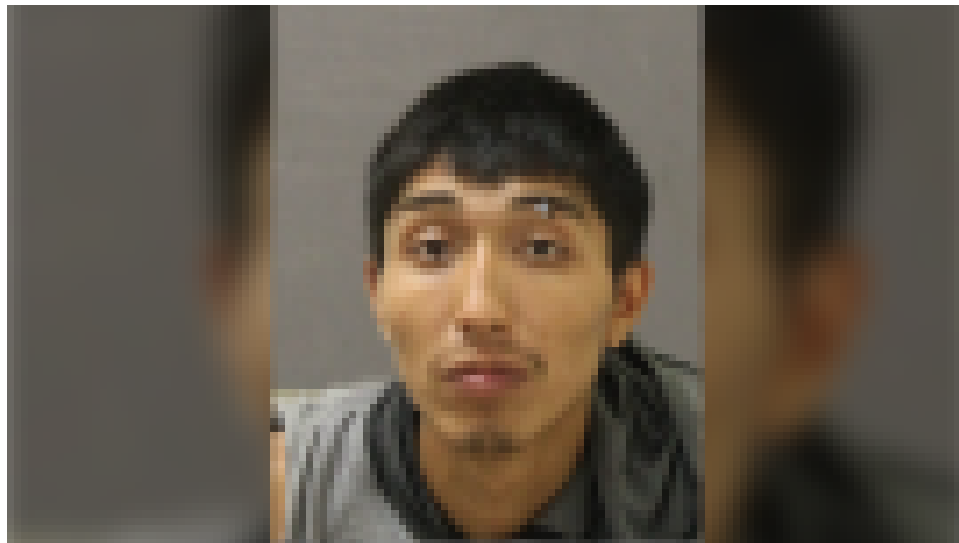
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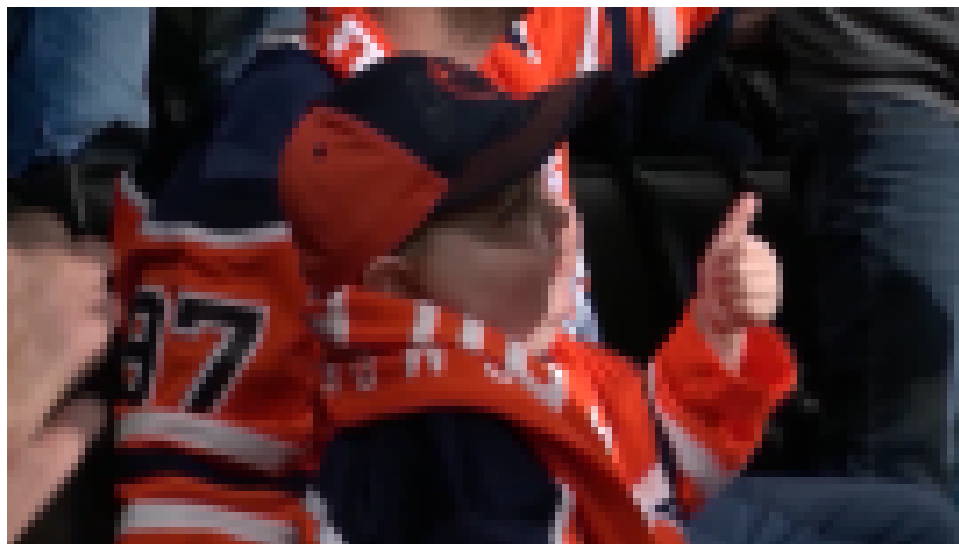
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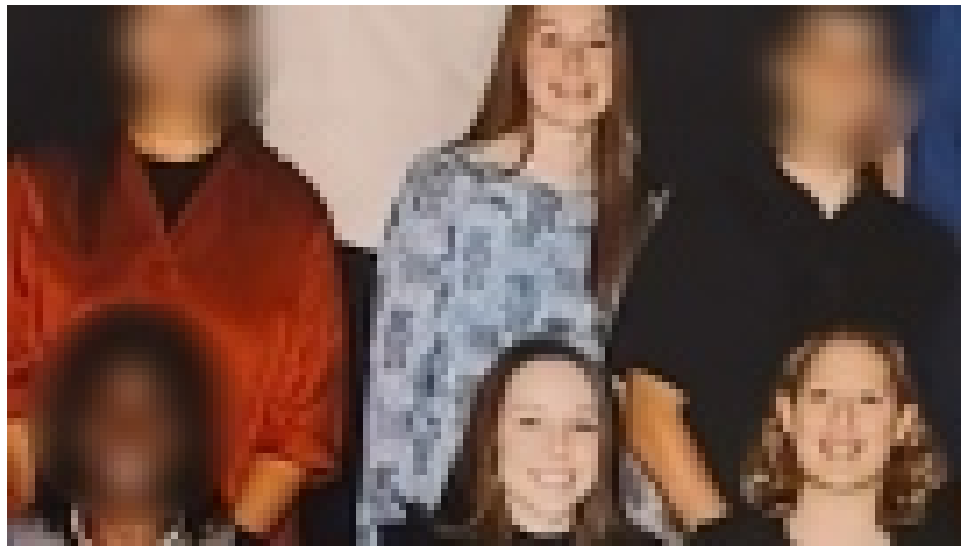
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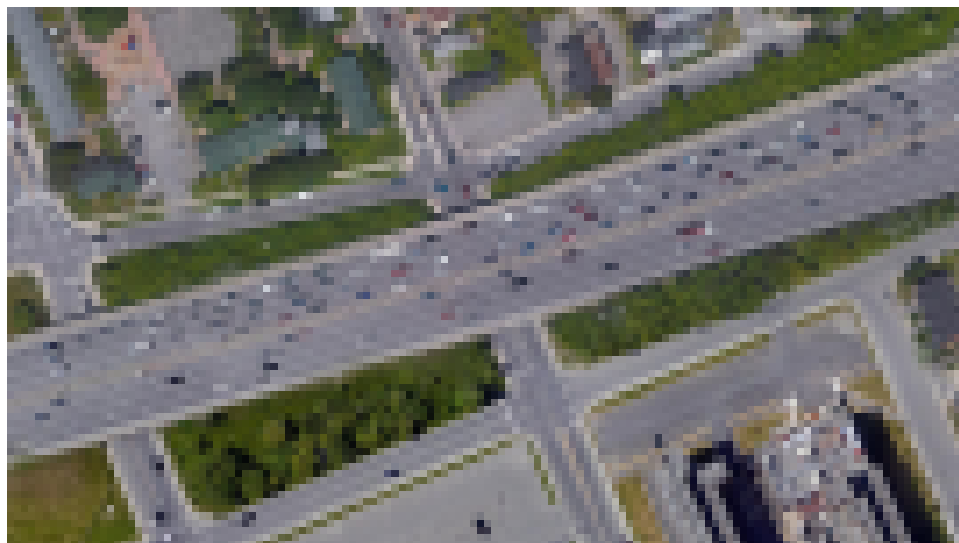
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